Most pollutants come from cars

The Vancouver Sun (British Columbia)

June 16, 1992, Tuesday, 1* EDITION

Copyright 1992 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest Global Communications Corp. All Rights Reserved

Section: Pg. A16

Length: 357 words

Byline: VANSUN

Series: EVERY BREATH WE TAKE

Body

Some of the pollutants that car owners contribute:

* Ground-level ozone pollution. It's the haze that hides the mountains. We know it as smog.

Ozone is a form of oxygen. It forms near the Earth's surface on sunny days, when volatile organic compounds (unburnt gas vapors, for example) and nitrogen oxides (a car pollutant) react together in sunlight.

In the Lower Mainland, about 75 per cent of these pollutants come from cars. Ground-level ozone decreases lung capacity, makes it harder to breathe and triggers coughing - especially for infants, the elderly and people with asthma.

The B.C. environment ministry warns: "The Lower Fraser Valley has one of the worst smog problems in Canada, surpassed only by the urban belt extending from Windsor to Quebec City. Strange as it may seem, though, downtown Vancouver does not experience the highest ozone levels in the area. The middle and eastern portions of the Lower Fraser Valley bear the brunt."

Like smog-plagued Los Angeles, the mountains here trap air pollutants during temperature inversions. Offshore breezes push the smog east to suburbs and farmlands, where ozone slows plant growth.

* Chlorofluorocarbons. High above the Earth is a shield of naturally occurring ozone. This is the ozone layer that shields us from ultra-violet rays.

The environment ministry says air conditioners in cars are the single largest source here of CFC-12, one of the chlorofluorocarbons that are destroying the layer which protects us from skin cancers. Freon is used in an air conditioner's cooling system and when released into the environment it forms CFCs.

The ministry's advice: "Avoid buying a car air conditioner . . . A vehicle with a light-colored exterior and interior can keep the hot weather from steaming you."

* Global warming, and its unknown impact on coastlines, forests, fisheries and food crops. Man-made emissions of carbon dioxide and other "greenhouses gases" are trapping the sun's warmth, as glass traps heat in a greenhouse.

Pulp mills and slashburning are the largest sources of carbon dioxide in B.C., but cars contribute about 20 per cent.

Graphic

Most pollutants come from cars

Maximum low-level ozone concentrations

Load-Date: June 17, 1992

End of Document